

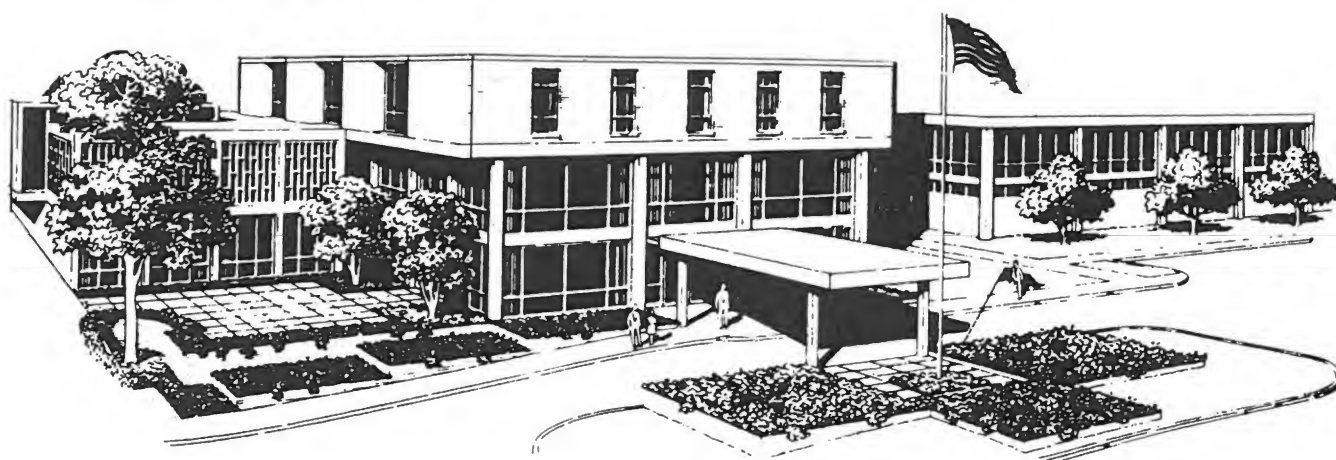
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The Administrative Internship: Another Look in an Urban School Setting

The increasing complexities of the principalship emphasize the crucial importance of identifying, selecting, preparing and placing qualified personnel in these positions. Improving effectiveness in the selection of principals, particularly in urban school systems, remains a problem which deserves special attention.

The development and implementation of an internship program for potential administrators demonstrated the awareness of and concern for the problem by the Mobile County Public School System. This system, which is the largest in Alabama, assumed a leadership role in cooperation with the University of Alabama, the State Department of Education and other agencies in attempting to define and design an effective internship program which might serve the purpose of improving local administrative leadership.

As stress factors increased in the latter sixties and early seventies there was a recognition in Mobile County that new and improved leadership functions at the individual school level were critical. In an effort to provide more effective leadership the Administrative Internship Program was initiated in 1970. The purpose of the program was to identify and develop leadership personnel who would be more responsive to the educational needs of the local school community. The stated aims of this internship program were to identify, select and determine the placement of administrative personnel. The program was to serve a twofold purpose: (1) to provide leadership training opportunities in a controlled environment, and (2) to provide quasi-

administrative assistance as needed in selected schools. In the development of and in this evaluation assessment of the internship program, system personnel had been influenced by the leadership provided by J. Lloyd Trump in his significant work under the NASSP Internship Program in the late 1960's.

The changing influences which impact upon local school administration provided a strong impetus for reviewing the program as the system moved toward the decade of the 1980's. Impending retirements of principals in the system during the next few years also provided increased urgency because a number of those planning to retire were key personnel in the system. Plans to separate unit schools (K-12) currently with one principal into multiple schools with multiple principals also raised the possibility that additional administrative personnel would be needed in the near future. A pending change in the superintendency in the system intensified the need for an information base for obvious programmatic decisions which would be forthcoming with a change in system leadership. Thus, there was an apparent need to assess the program through an evaluation of its effectiveness and its future potential.

Design of the Study

The study was descriptive and evaluative with the expressed purpose of assessing the administrative internship program in the Mobile County Public School System from its inception in 1970 until

1977. Specifically, the study focused upon an assessment of the intern program as perceived by the interns and the principals to whom interns were assigned. The internship program involved forty-eight intern participants and thirty supervising principals. Eight of the intern participants subsequently did not continue in administrative career patterns, but were included in the study.

Three descriptive instruments were used to gather assessment data: (1) the Intern Questionnaire, (2) the Noncompletion Intern Interview Guide, and (3) the Principal Questionnaire. Selected demographic and situational variables were included as a means of exploring possible differences in the perceptions of interns concerning the internship program. Organizational level, age, sex, race, educational preparation, years of experience, year of appointment and career patterns of the interns were utilized in subsequent analyses of the data provided by the interns.

Data provided by the principals were divided into three areas: (1) purpose, (2) operation, and (3) evaluation of the internship program. Principals were subdivided into two organizational levels: (1) secondary and (2) elementary. Correlations were established between the two groups in considering their responses.

The study included a comprehensive review of related literature on the concepts and development of internship programs in educational administration. An attempt was made to summarize the results of the investigation by ascertaining the value of the internship program for improving local school leadership in

Mobile County. The study provided a needed data base for future administrative decisions relative to the improvement of the program.

Conclusions

Analyses of the personal demographic variables available on the intern participants such as age, sex, race and years of experience provided the basis for the conclusion that equal access to the intern program as presently called for by recent court decisions may not have been in operation during the early years of the program. However, a study of the changes in the personal demographic variables over the seven years covered by the study indicated that the system is moving judiciously to comply with affirmative action guidelines in the identification and selection of potential administrators.

The positive responses from intern participants remaining in an administrative career pattern, as well as from the eight participants who decided not to continue to pursue administrative careers, permit the conclusion that the internship is serving a valuable career decision-making function. This conclusion is also supported by the significant increase in the certainty of the interns relative to their career goals and career decisions. The question must be raised for consideration, however, if the identification and screening procedures are as strong as they might need to be with the number of participants who decided not to pursue administrative careers.

The findings that sex and organizational levels of school placement were significantly related to the intern's perception of success, with females and elementary interns reflecting more positive perceptions, provided a basis for the conclusion that the elementary component of the intern program may be operating more effectively than is the secondary component. This conclusion was supported further by the differences in the opportunities to demonstrate data by program levels. The elementary interns indicated almost universal opportunities to demonstrate administrative performance in all areas which were assessed.

Several aspects of the study data, particularly comments in the open-ended responses by the principals, allowed the conclusion that the secondary level com-

ponent of the intern program has had some difficulty moving beyond the early stress upon the intern as a disciplinarian which was deemed necessary when student control problems were intensified by the school desegregation process. Other aspects of the open-ended responses by the interns provided a basis for the conclusion that the operational role of the interns in some situations lacked a degree of clarity. This lack of clarity in role definition possibly contributed to the somewhat less positive feelings of the interns in the administrative performance areas which focused upon the individual and organizational development and related change oriented responsibilities of administrators. The several references in the data to the implementation of the principle of delegation would seem also to be related to this clarity of role definition from a responsibility/authority perspective.

The multiple perceptions in the data relative to the optimum length of the internship experience and the appropriate number of school settings provided a basis for the conclusion that these two important operational variables have not been optimally determined. Such a determination may ultimately vary across organizational levels of intern placement and possibly with the individual intern involved.

The perceptual responses of the principals of a structured nature, as well as their open-ended comments, provided a basis for the conclusion that principals strongly support the internship program and encourage its continuation. The analyses of their perceptual responses according to organizational levels also supported the conclusion that elementary and secondary principals share somewhat common positive perceptions of the intern program. The data provided by the interns and the principals through their open-ended responses supported a conclusion that both of these groups should be viewed as valuable information sources relative to the continued strengthening of the ongoing internship program.

Recommendations

Consideration should be given to the question raised in the current study rela-

tive to the optimum length of the intern assignment in a particular school. With the increasing number of interns who remain in the program for a second year, special attention should be given also to the differentiation of the first and second year experiences.

As a means of increasing the level of general knowledge among system personnel and enhancing the equity according to sex, age and race in intern recruitment, a brochure which includes the purpose, objectives, selection process, application process and training opportunities should be widely distributed throughout the Mobile County Public School System. Consideration should be given also to the possibility that participation in the administrative internship should be a prerequisite for appointment to all local school administrative programs in Mobile County. With the relatively high number of interns who decided not to continue in administrative careers, careful attention should also be given to the identification and screening procedures currently being used.

Based upon the concerns reflected by the participating principals, consideration should be given to their involvement to a greater degree in the planning of the in-service component and their actual participation in aspects of it as a part of their own continuing professional development.

Consideration should be given to a study of a longitudinal nature which would look at the interns over time as individuals. Of particular interest in such a study would be the ability to monitor the feelings of former interns relative to their career decisions, the adequacy of the intern experience as tempered by school administrative experience and the continuing perceptions relative to their ability to meet the actual performance demands of local school administration.

Finally, with the impending passage of the State Department of Education guidelines which call for increased emphasis upon the development of field-based preparation programs in Alabama, consideration should be given to the formal involvement of institutions of higher education in the intern program with special attention given to credit and degree options which might be generated from such cooperative ventures. ■

